

Climate Advisory Bodies: Experiences and Approaches for Effective Climate Change Policy

Executive Summary

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This document comprises the Executive Summary of a report authored by the World Resources Institute (WRI) for input to a meeting of International Climate Councils in May 2021.

The Executive Summary has been published to accompany the open letter from the International Climate Councils Network published on 1st November 2021, with the intention of publishing the full report in due course.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of official climate advisory bodies in supporting effective climate policy around the world. We aim to address this overarching question: “How do climate advisory bodies support climate policy and what factors influence success and pose challenges?” To address the question, this study explores and compares the experiences of nine climate change advisory bodies from across six countries: Finland, India, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United Kingdom.

Following a qualitative research approach, insights from key experts were gathered through semi-structured interviews covering the perceived impact of each profiled advisory body. Interviews were codified and responses included the main paper.¹ Six country-specific case studies were prepared and can be found in the separate Annex. The experiences between countries were compared and synthesized across four thematic areas to facilitate further discussion at the meeting of International Councils, these were:

- (1) operating effective climate advisory bodies;
- (2) enabling and influencing climate action;
- (3) facilitating just transitions; and
- (4) informing policy and overseeing delivery across key sectors and adaptation.

A summary of key highlights from the study follows. Insights and experience shared during the International Climate Councils meeting² are also incorporated.

Operating Effective Climate Advisory Bodies

Interviewees identified several important operational and constitutional factors influencing the effectiveness of a climate advisory body:

- **Mandate established in legislation:** A mandate established in legislation is valuable in underpinning legitimacy and uptake of recommendations. Legislation can include mechanisms to formalize the relationship between the climate advisory body and government, and consideration of advice or findings. Furthermore, climate advisory bodies that are established by law have tended to benefit from long-term stability and permanence. That being said, there are some cases in which advisory bodies engaged in supplemental research endeavors that are beyond and complementary to their mandate have proved successful in advancing climate action and knowledge.
- **Independence:** In several cases, formal distance of the advisory body from government and interest groups was highlighted as a key factor for success.
- **Membership and leadership:** The composition, expertise, and reputation of advisory body members influences its work. In all country cases, strong leadership plays a critical role in ensuring that the body is able to effectively drive change.
- **Research practices, inputs and outputs:** A robust basis in the latest climate science and a broader evidence-led approach enables advisory bodies to provide objective and effective policy

¹ A detailed overview of the methodology and interviews will be published with the full paper

² The international Climate Councils meeting was held the 18th and 19th of May 2021, with representatives from 22 Climate Councils from countries around the world.

advice and evaluation (International Climate Councils Meeting, May 2021). To provide scientific evidence and supplement the expertise of members, several advisory bodies commission technical research from external sources or jointly prepare research between advisory body members and external experts. Data gathering is also made easier through strong connections and collaboration with government partners and made more robust by building a culture of high data quality and analytical credibility. Broader stakeholders are sometimes invited to provide input and feedback through consultations or peer review, although constraining factors, including time constraints and the lack of a specific mandate, limit this practice.

- **Operations and budget:** Most profiled advisory bodies rely on administrative and executive support from a behind-the-scenes staff or secretariat that is critical, particularly in cases where advisory body members are not paid or have other primary occupations. Of the cases assessed, all funding provided for the operations of the advisory bodies comes from the government directly. Some bodies have total autonomy in spending, while others are afforded less flexibility. Most country cases identified budget and resource constraints limiting the number of staff to support and deliver the overall work of the advisory body. Some interviewees noted the need for additional funding—or clarity on future funding—for their respective advisory bodies to deliver effective and impactful work. Time and human capacity constraints, both within the advisory body and in government at large, were noted challenges in a few country cases.

Enabling and Influencing Climate Action

Climate change advisory bodies can convene stakeholders and guide national debate in order to build consensus for policy actions, including on politically sensitive or challenging topics (International Climate Councils Meeting, May2021). Advisory bodies apply different processes for engaging stakeholders and delivering advice and recommendations to enable and influence climate action:

- **Engaging with government:** Advisory bodies interact with government in different ways, sometimes requiring more deliberate coordination by advisory body members in order to be impactful. In a few country cases, the binding mandate for the government to respond to its advisors' recommendations drives impact.
- **Engagement with the public and private sector:** In most countries, a close interaction with non-government actors is essential to bring in external views and provide credibility and validation. In a few country cases, the public also plays an important role in exerting outside pressure, complementing the work of the advisory body.
- **Engagement with the media:** In most country cases, interviewees noted that it is important for the advisory body to make a point of maintaining a regular media presence.

Facilitating Just Transitions

A few profiled climate advisory bodies have a focus on just transition-related issues. However, South Africa's Presidential Climate Commission (SAPCC) is the only independent body assessed in this study that has been established with a specific mandate to support a just transition. With the SAPCC being a fairly new body, it is too early to predict its impact and success. However, there are several considerations that provide a promising foundation:

- Councils can be particularly effective in this space by building off existing work and not reinventing the wheel.

- Effective just transition work will require more structured and in-depth engagement with major stakeholder groups than many councils undertake today.
- A key risk for councils working in this space is becoming a “talking shop,” particularly when salient topics like just transitions also require the implementation of actual projects and appropriate social safety nets. Accordingly, the advice from advisory bodies must be structured in a way to inform direct on-the-ground changes.

Informing Policy and Overseeing Delivery across Key Sectors and Adaptation

When asked about specific examples of overall policy impact and challenges, interviewees provided a range of examples covering high-level, overarching influence on climate change policy and national discourse, as well as more detailed, sector- or policy-specific examples:

- **Raising the profile of climate change:** In all country cases, advisory bodies play an important role in drawing high-level attention to the topic of climate change and stimulating discourse. Advisory bodies can also drive progress and provide the necessary technical and political backing to affect the policymaking process, even in times of political transition.
- **Influencing sectoral policy and adaptation:** Councils have varying experience of successfully influencing policy, but particular insights include being ready to capitalize on opportune moments to influence policy, the ability to reflect the perspectives of key stakeholder groups, robust analysis of policy options and ensuring advice has clear sectoral focus and specific recommendations without being over prescriptive. There were also challenges, limitations and other positive insights including the secondary benefit of awareness-raising and consensus-building and supporting multiple steps of the policy-making beyond analysis.
- **Wider political context:** Timing and the growing recognition of the need for climate action were noted as critical influencing factors triggering a political response and leading to the establishment of a climate advisory body. Political buy-in and cross-party support was also noted as a huge factor in driving impact and sustaining the climate advisory body.
- **Coordination challenges:** Coordination and managing shared responsibility with subnational and nongovernment stakeholders was noted as a challenge for advancing policy implementation in a few country cases, in part due to challenges associated with cost-sharing and decentralized resource management.
- **Challenging topics:** A range of contentious or challenging topics were highlighted as being difficult to navigate, particularly in areas that affect consumers, jobs, and social justice, in part due to a lack of political will in these areas and vested interests. Capacity also limits some Councils ability to provide comprehensive advice across all topics or issues.

Conclusion

Drawing from the findings of the study, the authors have identified **recommendations** to underpin effective climate advisory bodies:

1. Advisory bodies should be provided with an official, and if appropriate – legal mandate and necessary resources to provide effective advice and or scrutiny on climate action. The roles and responsibilities of the advisory body and Government, and procedures for their engagement should be transparently outlined.
2. Advisory bodies should apply the latest climate science and robust analytical methods to inform evidence-based advice and assessments.
3. Advisory bodies should select members with deep technical expertise, who are leaders in their respective fields spanning a range of subject areas most relevant to enabling climate action. Members should enjoy strong public and stakeholder trust and act in an objective capacity.
4. Advisory bodies should build in a role for high-profile leaders suited to the national context and political system of the country.
5. Advisory bodies should establish appropriate and transparent stakeholder processes to engage key actors responsible for climate policy implementation including subnational and regional governments and the private sector to better support development and implementation of recommendations.
6. Advisory bodies have experience in a range of challenges and topics. Where one entity is struggling, another may be making progress so advisory bodies should consider targeted exchange and outreach to their peers.